

Leaving the Gangster Things to the Boys Growing Up Now

Young Men, Physical Violence, and
Structural Violence in
Post-Transition South Africa

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Abstract

This paper examines the intersection of physical violence, structural violence, and masculinity through the life history narrative of a 20-year-old man exiting an informal gang in Gugulethu, a township in Cape Town. Beginning and remaining with James Madoda's narrative, the paper shows how the gendered physical violence between young men in townships emerges from historical and present-day structural violence – here defined as institutionalised power inequalities that limit life opportunities – and argues that structural violence needs to be discussed and addressed as a policy issue in South Africa. It also suggests that structural violence may provide a platform for collaboration among civil society actors working on socioeconomic transformation and the prevention of violence.

Researcher: Okay, James, my name is Chiedza. Today I'm just going to be talking to you, or not talking to you but listening to your life story. I'd like to hear about your life, where you were born, how you grew up. I just want to hear your life story. So, who is James?

James Madoda: I'm James. I was born in Gugulethu, Jooste Hospital. At a young age, when I was growing up, some of my family members used to grieve me, but not in a bad way, as I was growing. And my parents, they both were alcoholics, but now, through time, [that] has changed, they've become better. For me, when I was growing up, it was very hard for me because some things that I mustn't have done, I done, and some were bad and some were right.

So, from the beginning, when I arrested at the age of 10, I started getting into a group here in my neighbourhood called Monetone. We done many wrong, but I remember what I did, it was wrong. I used to rob people, stab people. I never shot somebody but I shot before with a gun in the sky. But many things I regret what I've done during the time that I done that things.

R: Tell me what you remember about being a child – about your house, where you stayed, what type of person was your mom, what type of person was your dad, your brothers, your sisters – just for me to get a glimpse of that.

JM: When I grew up, I lived with my father, not here, that side [of the area]. So that's why I changed, because my mother wasn't with me all the time. Skip two months then I'll see my mother maybe once or twice.

My parents were separated, and my brothers. Everything was the same when I came from that side. I would spend time with everyone here: my grandma, grandpa, sister, brother, uncles, cousins, everybody.

R: And what do you remember about your dad when you were young?

JM: Ha, he was the one who was beating and shouting at me. I can talk the truth, I can say he's the one that made me do all the things I've done.

My dad? He's a violent guy. He likes to shout, he likes to beat, and if you don't listen to him, you'll sure get something out of him, about my dad, how I know him.

R: And what was your relationship with your dad like?

JM: We never talked, but we lived in the same house. He would just tell me to do something and I do something for him and I'll go back into my room, sit in my room the whole day. We weren't like best buddies. Enemies living under one roof, that's how I grew, from about seven to 10 years old.

R: And your mom?

JM: My mom, she's a loving person. She likes to talk, likes to ask you, like, how was dad, school, things like that. *Ja*, talkative, a talkative mother.

I have a good relationship with my mother. I can talk to her, anything I'd like to talk to. She also encourages me where I went wrong to do right.

R: How did you get involved with Monetone? How did you find out about it? You said you were 10 years old?

JM: When I was about nine years old, playing with my other friends in the street, we used to see the guys that was older than us, about 13 years older than us. So, they used to walk around and they used to fight, and we liked to follow them and watch where them's maybe fighting other groups from other sections. They used to fight and we would move after them. When I already joined this gang, Monetone, that was when I started smoking *dagga*. That was at 10 years, *ja*, I still remember, the 31st of March.

R: What type of group was it? Did you look to them as your heroes? Were they like your big brothers?

JM: At first, I could say that, *ja*, 'cause they were from my town, most of them in the same street, neighbourhood. Most of them, I knew them, and I could say that I looked up to them.

R: How did being part of the group make you feel?

JM: At first it made me feel like, how can I say, like a superstar. Some people looked up to me. These boys that are my – 11 years old, 12 years old – now they looked up to me at that stage when I was at the top of the gang. Many people liked me and some didn't like me because I joined the gang. Some of my best friends, they even told me, nah, that's not your friends anymore because of this gang that I joined.

R: Were there particular things that you were supposed to do to be part of the group, or could you just join?

JM: Nah, you couldn't just join. You must do something. At first, they told me what I must do: I must rob somebody and bring the money and a phone if I got a phone. I achieved that on the first time. They said, you can be in but not yet, you must still show us why you want to be in the group. So that was when we fought other boys from that side [of the area]. They are a gang called the Arabics.

I was 15 at that time. And that's when they first saw me, what I was capable of doing when working with them in a gang. 'Cause I can still remember, I stabbed a boy in the throat, I sent him into a coma, that was the first thing. I still remember that day, what I was supposed to do to get into the group, to be a full member of the group.

R: And so that gave you a higher rank?

JM: They ranked me up. I can almost say I was third from the leader.

R: So the group, was it a group of young people or were there much older people in the group?

JM: There was older and the younger, 'cause I was the younger group, but not with the older group.

R: So there were two wings, the younger ones and the older ones? When you are young, do you graduate to become the older ones or you can just leave when you ...

JM: Nah, the young one, you can join, but we nothing. The older one you must do something to join it. When you want to go out it's not that easy.

R: Did this affect your relationship with your family?

JM: A couple of months, a few months, they did not notice, but after I was caught by the police and the police came with me home, that was the first time that they actually got a fright that I was in a gang, and our relationship at home changed dramatically. They didn't want to give me money to buy me stuff like clothes. They didn't want me to sleep in the house because they thought I maybe steal the things in the house and go sell them for my own goods. It wasn't a very tight bond, *ja*.

R: How did being part of the gang make you feel?

JM: I thought, nah man, being in a gang is not gonna benefit anything because you just gonna fight, maybe kill people and then you will end up like ... maybe you can die tomorrow 'cause I don't know who's following me at which time. At the end of the day, I thought, nah man, a gang wasn't for me no more. 'Cause I took a seat and I think back about the things that I've done. Now I'm trying to correct most of the things that I've done in the past now.

Thing that made me think back was, one time, I met another guy, this guy they stabbed, they put in a coma. I met him and he asked me, "Are you alive?" and I asked him, "Why do you ask?" He said, "Nah man, I shot you, in the head." And then I said, "No, you didn't shoot me, it was somebody else." So that made me pull back, I must take a stand back for the things that I'm doing.

R: Would you like to tell me about your life at school? What was your experience like at school, in the classroom, on the field, as a boy in school?

JM: It was quite nice for me in high school. That's when I was a full member of the gang and the boys that we fought, they also went school there, our school, so it gave me more energy to chase these boys in school and after school. Every day was the same thing: we came to school, we chased, we fought in the school ground, outside the school ground, and after school we also fight. And I can say we fought for nothing 'cause I didn't know why was I fighting. I just fought because this group, they fought with other groups. But my school days weren't the best.

R: Why do you say that?

JM: Because of the thing I said about, every day, fighting, fighting. 'Cause it's just fighting, fighting, fighting, fighting. You go to school, get in the class, you think about what you gonna do after this period. Are we gonna chase these boys or must we stab these boys? Things like that.

R: So the other boys looked up to you in class, thought you were their hero, the younger boys?

JM: Every time that we fought, these boys used to cheer for me, and then maybe after, when we fought, these boys, they would come to me and say, "James, I like what you doing, I love what you doing, because these boys sometimes they don't give us the freedom that we must have at school." They get robbed by these boys that we fought with and stuff like that. They looked up to me, most of them looked up to me, and still today they look up to me.

R: And what was your relationship like with the teachers? Did the teachers know that you were part of this group?

JM: They didn't know because when I was in class I was just busy with my schoolwork. I made sure that I didn't want no one to know – no teacher, principal and the security that was securing the school grounds – that I was part and one of the big guys in the gang.

I knew that if they knew they would've dropped me out of school at that time or maybe sent me to prison or to a rehab centre or something like that. That's why I kept underground.

R: How did you get to leave the group?

JM: I can say thanks to my girlfriend. It's because of her that I stepped back and I saw that this wouldn't be the right path for me, because I was in gangsterism from 10 years to age 17. I stepped out of it because she told me, "No, James man, people are after you, there are people chasing you, so why must you still walk with people and people are after you, not after your friends, they're after you now." So that's when I thought let me take a step back and just leave the gangster things to the boys that are growing up now.

My girlfriend, she's a lovely chick, I love her. She lives opposite my house and most of my secrets, everything, I can tell to her. And she's also like a mother, she likes to encourage me.

R: When did you guys meet?

JM: When I joined the gangster. From 15 years to this day, I'm still with her. Our relationship, for me it's a loving relationship because we don't fight, we don't scream at each other when we have problems. We help each other solve our problems.

R: When you were still in Monetone, did that affect your relationship? Did you have a bad temper then or what was your relationship like?

JM: When I was still with them, my relationship with her was, it was still a tight relationship, but there was some times that we used to scream at each other in the street and I just wanted to, can I say, to hit her but my self-emotion told me don't do that because if you hit her, tomorrow you won't be with her. Our relationship, it was a tight relationship but sometimes somewhere there was some difficulties.

R: What kind of difficulties?

JM: When she sees me walking with the gang, she didn't like that at all. In the time I was still with the gang, I used to get drunk and catch up with other girls, and I know that she would find out about the things I was doing. So she would come to me or the girl I'm sitting with and she would hit the girl, she would tell me, "Let's go home and we'll solve it out at home."

R: How has it been for you now that you are not part of the gang? Is it any different now, the way people treat you?

JM: It's very different. I still have people looking up to me, not as a gangster but as a person who came out of gangsterism, dropped out of school, went back to school to go finish school.

R: You didn't tell me about dropping out of school.

JM: That was when I was at my most, how can I say, my most vilest when I dropped out of school. When I used to bunk school, I fought these boys, went back home, jumped into the school grounds without permission. That is when they caught me at school and they told me, "We must do something about you," and the next day I didn't go to school and the following day I didn't go to school and it went on like that when I dropped out of school. That was for one and a half year.

R: What made you decide to go back?

JM: I thought of the opportunities that I may have had if I didn't drop out of school. I can still have many of them now, the opportunities. That inspired me to go back to school. It's my dream to finish school. I'd like to be a pilot.

R: What subjects are you are comfortable with?

JM: Geography, Life Orientation, Business Studies. It's my first year I'm doing Business Studies. I'm a good student, they say. English and Afrikaans. Those are the subjects I like.

R: Are there people that are still following you because they think you are still part of Monetone or are there people that still want to start fights with you just to see?

JM: I won't say that because many people that I fought that time, when I meet them now, they like, "James, are you all right? Are you still in?" "Nah, I'm not in." They say, "Nah, we also *los* it," took a step back from these things 'cause we gave it to the youngsters that are growing up now so they can experience what we experienced at the age.

R: Is it a common thing among people that were in the gangs to take a step back?

JM: I think they see that the things that they have done wrong doesn't benefit them, they don't get nothing out of it. That's why I think they took a step back.

R: Do you think if the area that you grew in was different, you wouldn't have joined the Monetones, or if your dad hadn't been beating you, do you think that would have made a difference to the decisions that you have made?

JM: No, because when I was still growing up, for me it was a dream to be a gangster. It was not my dad, it was not the people, it was me myself who wanted to experience it, how does it feel to be one.

R: Who would you say were your role models then?

JM: *Yoh*, many of them. The big guys, the big ones. Yanga. He's from here but he's no longer with us. Thembaletu. My best friends. Thembaletu was the boss and the first one who left us. He got shot in the head on his way to go see his girlfriend. Yanga, he also got shot in the head when he was partying, drinking. Some of his old enemies came and they shot him.

R: Do you think the way that these guys left also influenced the decision you made?

JM: *Ja*.

R: Who are your role models now?

JM: I don't have any role models in gangsterism. I would say now my role model is a soccer player from Argentina, plays for Barcelona, Lionel Messi. I like the way he plays soccer, the way he skilful, and the respect he has for other players.

R: Are you also a soccer player?

JM: I am a soccer player. From a young age, my talent was to play soccer and I am very good at soccer.

R: So where would you see James in the next 10 years, where do you see yourself?

JM: See myself flying in the sky in a aeroplane.

R: And what type of person do you see yourself as in the next 10 years?

JM: I see myself as a caring person, to help teenagers to don't go through what I went through at the age. I would like to give back to my community.

R: Do you think you'd be your dad all over again or would you do some things differently?

JM: I'll be a different person, not like my dad. I don't want to be the same as him. I see myself as a helping father, listening father, communicating father, respect father, and loving always.

R: Thank you, James, for your time, but if you feel like there's anything that you'd like to tell me later, you can always follow up. Or if there are other things I would like to follow up on, can I ask you other questions again later?

JM: Yes.

R: All right. Thank you.

Introduction

James Madoda is a slight, soft-spoken 20-year-old. When researcher Chiedza Chagutah first met him in October 2011, she noted she was studying violence and asked him to tell her about his life.¹ The narrative above is how James chose to address both violence and his life story. Within his first few comments, James captures his experience of growing up in Gugulethu, the violence and instability of his early family life, his long-time membership in a neighbourhood gang, the serious violence he perpetrated as part of that group, and the process of continually weighing what he perceives as the “right” and “bad” actions of this life and facing his own regrets. These comments suggest that James feels a sense of redemption in turning away from violence but also an ambivalence regarding the “wrong” he has done.

Personal and specific, James’ brief life history nonetheless echoes the experiences of six other men between the ages of 16 and 33 Chiedza spoke with in the townships of Gugulethu and nearby Mfuleni.² This paper remains with James’ life history, reading his stories about his experiences as told in this and a follow-up conversation, as well as conversations with James’ mother and maternal grandmother.³ These narratives are compared with and put into context by those of the other young men with whom Chiedza talked. The paper focuses not only on James’ description of his experiences and ideas of violence but also on how he grew up, the influences that have shaped his life, and how he perceives those close to him, his neighbourhood, and the larger environment of the state and world in which he lives. This is why James’ narrative has been placed at the beginning of the paper, so that it is read, can be referred to repeatedly, and stands as an

¹ Chiedza, a member of the Violence and Transition research team, is a Master’s student in Gender Studies at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) with an interest in how masculinities are constructed. She met with James five times between October 2011 and February 2012 and recorded two conversations with him, as well as all the other conversations discussed here. I joined the research team after the beginning of the project to analyse the transcripts specifically through a structural violence lens. Along with a few purely clarifying questions from Chiedza, much of the thicket of regular and recurring interjections James uses while talking – mainly “um,” “ja,” and variations on “that’s what I can say” – has been taken out of the narrative at beginning of the paper in order to make it legible and accessible to a wider readership. I argue that transcription may obscure the meaning that such interjections supply in conversation. The original transcript is available upon request. Except for Chiedza’s, all names have been changed to protect the identities of the speakers.

² Xolani, Gugulethu, 26 October 2011; Eric, Gugulethu, 26 October 2011 and 3 February 2012; Andile, Mfuleni, 29 November 2011; Vuyani, Mfuleni, 30 November 2011; JB, Mfuleni, 30 November 2011; Njabulo, Mfuleni, 1 December 2011. These were supplemented by a group discussion with six young men in Gugulethu on 27 January 2012 and a follow-up group discussion and feedback session with five young men at UWC in Bellville on 17 August 2012. Of the men Chiedza spoke with, only two were above the age of 23.

³ James, Gugulethu, 3 February 2012; Natasha, James’ mother, Gugulethu, 16 March 2012; Marah, James’ grandmother, Gugulethu, 16 March 2012.

individual's telling of the violence under study, with its particular emphases on certain topics and silences on others. The life history approach is one of the distinguishing features of the third phase of the Violence and Transition project, a series of studies on the relationship of violence to transition conducted by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR).⁴

With this approach, the paper provides an intimate perspective on some of CSVR's previous findings concerning violence perpetrated by young men in South Africa's cities, particularly in several components of a study on the violent nature of crime produced between 2007 and 2010.⁵ One component of that study, published in 2008, discusses ways in which poverty and, particularly, inequality give rise to violence based on crime statistics and international and South African literature on the topic.⁶ The 2008 report breaks with past CSVR reports that tended to signal the influence of socioeconomic factors without specifically examining them.⁷ It is bolstered by another component of the study that offers a brief analysis of reflections regarding poverty growing up, unemployment, and the economic gains of violent crime offered by imprisoned perpetrators who were mainly in their mid- to late 20s when interviewed.⁸ This paper takes up the discussion on socioeconomic roots of physical violence through the narratives of James, his family members, and his peers.

The paper also responds to the study's call for further research on "male–male assaults," described as violence emerging from interpersonal disputes between men who know each other, which in the South African case results in up to 90 percent of homicide victims in cities being men.⁹ I look mainly at the experiences of young men, like James, who are "between the ages of 12 and 22,"

⁴ The project has examined the continuities and changes in the character of violence before and after transition through various lenses. For an overview of the project, begun in 1999, see, Bronwyn Harris, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Violence, Transition and Democratisation: A Consolidated Review of the Violence and Transition Project* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2006).

⁵ See, David Bruce, *Tackling Armed Violence: Key Findings and Recommendations of the Study on the Violent Nature of Crime in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2010). The study was commissioned by the Ministry of Safety and Security on behalf of the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security cluster of Cabinet.

⁶ Antony Altbeker, *Adding Insult to Injury: How Exclusion and Inequality Drive South Africa's Problem of Violence* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2008).

⁷ See, for example, the minor presence of socioeconomic issues in the components of previous phases of the Violence and Transition project in Harris, *supra* n 4.

⁸ Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), on behalf of Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, *Case Studies of Perpetrators of Violent Crime* (November 2008).

⁹ Bruce, *supra* n 5 at 47.

when they are most likely to be both victims and perpetrators of violent crime in South Africa.¹⁰ The bulk of James' narrative, as is the case with his peers, focuses on violence perpetrated by young men against other young men from their area, although usually from other neighbourhoods and informal gangs. Four of the seven men Chiedza spoke with have been in informal, territorial neighbourhood gangs. None has crossed into more formal gangs that participate in organised crime or been imprisoned for a violent crime. In fact, the four young men who have been involved in gangsterism are having second thoughts or have decided to leave their neighbourhood gangs. As James describes it, "Many people that I fought that time, when I meet them now, they like, 'James, are you all right? Are you still in?' 'Nah, I'm not in.' They say, 'Nah, we also *los* it,' took a step back from these things."¹¹ This shift away from gangsterism will be discussed below, but the fact remains that whether gangster or not, physical violence is woven into the life stories of these seven young men and how they choose to describe themselves to Chiedza.

As most of the violence discussed is "male–male" and as the narratives demonstrate that violence is associated with young manhood, I will approach this violence as gendered, or gender based.¹² While the terms "gender" and "gender-based violence" have predominantly been used in reference to women and girls, this paper joins the more recent "turn to men" in literature on gender, examining the way in which the formation of young masculinities is linked to violence in the narratives.¹³ Based entirely on themes that emerge from the narratives, the paper suggests that boys in James' area associate physical violence with social visibility and growing up into a young man, but are ambivalent about violence because of mixed messages they receive about it from adults in the home, neighbourhood, and school. While violence is presented and perceived as "wrong," it is also often considered legitimate, particularly when it is aimed at providing guidance, protection, discipline, and an order of self-reliance. The narratives also suggest that the young men

¹⁰ Lezanne Leoschut and Angela Bonora, "Offender Perspectives in Violent Crime," in *Someone Stole My Smile: An Exploration into the Causes of Youth Violence in South Africa*, ed. Patrick Burton (Cape Town: Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2007).

¹¹ James, 26 October 2011.

¹² The literature on constructions of masculinity and the legitimisation of male violence is vast. For discussions of this subject in the South African context, see, Kopano Ratele, "Ruling Masculinity and Sexuality," *Feminist Africa* 6 (2006): 48–64; Kopano Ratele, "Masculinity and Male Mortality in South Africa," *African Safety Promotion* 6(2) (2008): 19–41; Malose Langa, "'Crime Does Not Pay': Contradictions and Internal Tensions in Promoting Non-Violent Masculinities amongst Adolescent Boys in Alexandra Township, South Africa," *South African Crime Quarterly* 2 (2011): 48–52.

¹³ Tamara Shefer, Kopano Ratele, Anna Strelbel, Nokuthla Shabalala, and Rosemarie Buikema, *From Boys to Men: Social Constructions of Masculinity in Contemporary Society* (Cape Town: Juta, 2008), ii.

have been turned inward on their neighbourhoods since boyhood, rarely leaving them and feeling disconnected from the rest of the city. While neighbourhood life offers comfort and a sense of belonging, it also exposes them to physical violence from other young men as well as neighbours and police suspicious of their lifestyles. Spending days on the corner in the neighbourhoods, young men serve as role models to boys who grow up “watching” them, including as they engage in serious violence from day to day. The narratives suggest that this dynamic is reproduced from generation to generation of boys and young men. The young men talk about feeling little agency in their perpetration of violence, which they perceive as nearly unavoidable, but note that they expect to leave it behind when they grow into adult men, whose violence has a far more agentic character and is oriented more towards the self and family than towards the group and neighbourhood. This indicates that physical violence among men under the age of 23 in Gugulethu and Mfuleni, particularly among teenage men, is different from violence perpetrated by older men and warrants specific research.

The paper links the descriptions of physical violence that pepper the narratives to the structural violence that shadows James’ story. Following peace studies pioneer Johan Galtung, structural violence here is defined as institutionalised power inequalities that limit opportunities in life. It can be understood not only as inadequate access to basic services, such as healthcare, education, housing, and sanitation but also as constraints on opportunities in terms of employment, social mobility, political participation, and so on. These unequal chances are built into the social and economic structure, entrenched by individuals and institutions at all levels of society, and legitimised by governmental policy choices. Importantly, Galtung argues that because these constraints are “avoidable,” they are a form of violence.¹⁴ Anthropologist Paul Farmer builds on this notion to argue that structural violence is “not the result of accident or a *force majeure* ... [but] the consequence, direct or indirect, of human agency.”¹⁵ While structural violence is pervasive and so normalised that it is usually accepted as a fact of life, it has “a human decision ... behind it.”¹⁶ Based on the narratives of James and his peers, this paper discusses structural violence as both a root of physical violence and as a form of violence in itself.

¹⁴ Johan Galtung, “Kulturelle Gewalt,” *Der Burger im Staat* 43 (1993): 106.

¹⁵ Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 40.

¹⁶ Paul Farmer, “On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below,” *Daedalus* 125(1) (1996): 272. See also, Paul Farmer, “An Anthropology of Structural Violence,” *Current Anthropology* 45(3) (2004): 303–325.

The discussion on structural violence builds on the 2007–2010 study’s assertion that economic factors are a driver of physical violence. Anthony Altbeker argues that the majority of South Africa’s population has been excluded from participating in the economy as a result of constraints on their family’s and own education and acquisition of skills, where they were born and now live, and limits to their social networks that undermine their chances of finding work.¹⁷ He posits that these factors are a result of the colonial and apartheid legacies of South Africa, as well as policy choices, particularly regarding the country’s economic “growth path,” made by government since the 1994 political transition to democracy. Approaching these arguments through James’ narratives, this paper confirms that James’ family has historically had limited opportunities in terms of education and skilled work, and shows how this is continuing in James’ life through negative experiences at school and vague expectations regarding finding future work. I suggest that the absence of parents and other caregivers driven to work predominantly in the informal sector, which does not provide the protections of predictable hours and personal leave usually offered by formal employment, has contributed to James spending days in the neighbourhood with little oversight or access to the world outside his area, participating in the reproduction of physical violence from generation to generation of boys and young men. The structural violence in the young men’s narratives is therefore intimately linked to the prevalence of physical violence in their everyday lives.

While supporting the argument that South Africa’s history and current policies give rise to physical violence, the paper interrogates Altbeker’s assertion that “psychosocial consequences,” namely “huge discontent, frustration and anger” as well as “insecurity and self-doubt,” among people living with exclusion are the main drivers of physical violence, at least among the young men with whom Chiedza spoke.¹⁸ I suggest that research on physical violence needs to go beyond the dominant approaches of, on the one hand, examining psychosocial influences, which may invite readings of violence as the pathological or “antisocial”¹⁹ responses of aberrant individuals, and, on the other hand, linking the intergenerational reproduction and acceptance of violence to the unstable concept of culture – as in “culture of violence” – which has shifting and multiple

¹⁷ Altbeker, *supra* n 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁹ For a sample discussion of young individuals’ “antisocial” behaviour, see, Leoschut and Bonora, *supra* n 10.

definitions.²⁰ The latter can be problematic because the popular understanding of culture is that, like tradition, it is static and unresponsive to attempts at change.²¹ Culture can also be associated with a particular group in a way that serves to “other” that group. Both individualisation based on psychosocial influences and generalisation to culture can contribute to the acceptance of physical and structural violence as a fact of life, as well as the “othering” of victims and perpetrators in areas where these forms of violence are prevalent.

While acknowledging the value of research into the psychosocial drivers of physical violence as well as the way violent behaviour has been legitimised and reproduced since colonial times and even earlier in South Africa, this paper suggests that these approaches may sideline other ways of seeking to understand violence and proposes that the country’s current political context invites more analyses based on the concept of structural violence. In addition to building on the assertion that structural violence is a root of physical violence, it posits that structural violence in South Africa – socioeconomic marginalisation institutionalised through government policies, specifically post-transition economic policies – is a form of state violence. This violence is politically and socially legitimised to the point that it is accepted as a fact of life by both outsiders and insiders to areas most affected by it. This comes through strongly in the narratives, as structural violence appears invisible to the young men with whom Chiedza spoke.

The conversations with James and others discussed here were not held with the specific aim of examining structural violence, although Chiedza and I asked a few questions regarding the poverty and inequality in the young men’s neighbourhoods and their expectations of the state. Conversations designed to foreground structural violence may have yielded different narratives. This might be viewed as a limitation of engaging with these particular transcripts, but I argue that this approach reveals how structural violence is perceived and functions in everyday life better than pointed questions might do. The paper is ultimately intended to provoke discussion on ways to

²⁰ The concept of “culture of violence” is often used by South African analysts, including CSVr researchers. See, Lloyd Vogelmann and Sharon Lewis, *Gang Rape and the Culture of Violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 1993); Graeme Simpson, “Explaining Endemic Violence in South Africa” (1993), <http://www.csvr.org.za/wits/papers/papendem.htm> (accessed 28 August 2012); Jonny Steinberg, ed., *Crime Wave: The South African Underworld and Its Foes* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001); Bruce, supra n 5.

²¹ This understanding has certainly been challenged by anthropologists and others who argue that culture is constantly in flux. While this critique is increasingly accepted, it is not necessarily the dominant popular thinking on culture. See, for example, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds., *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

address historical and ongoing structural violence in South Africa and to interrupt the related intergenerational reproduction of physical violence among boys and young men under 23 in poor urban areas that has been going on since well before the 1994 political transition.

Narratives of Belonging and Exclusion: Physical and Structural Violence in the Neighbourhood

In his 2008 report, Altbeker notes that there is “wide consensus” that South Africa’s high levels of violent crime are linked to and partly caused by its high levels of economic inequality.²² He suggests that the historical roots of the country’s inequality lie in colonialism and apartheid, both of which were based on enforcing unequal access to resources and services that benefitted the White population, institutionalising and systematising the subordination of people classified as African, Coloured, or Indian under apartheid. The transition to democratic government in 1994, which rode on promises of a better life for the oppressed majority of South Africans, led to improvements in the civil and political rights of the population but not to the significant socioeconomic changes expected by many. As another recent study has put it, “For the poor ... the demise of apartheid might have brought dignity, but it has not brought real opportunity.”²³ South Africa’s high levels of inequality have, in fact, only increased since the 1990s.²⁴

Following Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass,²⁵ Altbeker argues that inequality has been exacerbated by what he calls the country’s “growth path,” which focuses on industries that are capital and skills intensive, and therefore on providing jobs for skilled workers. This approach,

²² Altbeker, supra n 6 at 4. For international literature on the links between inequality and violence, see, Martin Daly, Margo Wilson, and Shawn Vasdev, “Income Inequality and Homicide Rates in Canada and the United States,” *Canadian Journal of Criminology* 43 (2011): 219–236; Pably Faynzilber, Daniel Lederman, and Norman Loayza, *Determinants of Crime Rates in Latin America and the World: An Empirical Assessment* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1998). See also, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009); Ichiro Kawachi, Bruce P. Kennedy, and Richard G. Wilkinson, “Crime: Social Disorganization and Relative Deprivation,” *Social Science and Medicine* 48(6) (1999): 719–731.

²³ Rachel Bray, Imke Gooskens, Lauren Kahn, Sue Moses, and Jeremy Seekings, *Growing Up in the New South Africa: Childhood and Adolescence in Post-Apartheid Cape Town* (Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council, 2010), 23.

²⁴ Murray Leibbrandt, Ingrid Woolard, Arden Finn, and Jonathan Argent, *Trends in South African Income Distribution and Poverty since the Fall of Apartheid* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010); J.P. Landman, *Breaking the Grip of Poverty and Inequality in South Africa, 2004–2014: Current Trends, Issues and Future Policy Options* (Stellenbosch: Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa Institute, 2003).

²⁵ Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass, *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006).

adopted by the African National Congress (ANC) government in 1996 in the form of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) plan, has effectively excluded the many South Africans who as a result of pre-transition social and economic policies – colonial- and apartheid-era structural violence – do not have the skills or level of education required by this growth plan. The majority is furthermore at an intergenerational disadvantage in terms of getting a better education, acquiring skills, or even gaining access to the job market because of the limited education, skills, and current employment levels within their families and communities.²⁶ Altbeker suggests that this dynamic is worsened by the geographic ghettoisation of people categorised as African, Coloured, or Indian during apartheid, which continues to affect their chances of finding work today.²⁷ I engage with these ongoing constraints on life opportunities as structural violence.

The following sections explore these arguments regarding exclusion through James' reflections on different stages of his life, along with the narratives offered by his grandmother and mother and the other young men. Starting with boyhood, I outline how the structural violence of historical exclusion through low levels of education and skills plays out in James' family, and how the demands of informal and low-skilled jobs drive caregivers' absence from home and contribute to boys and young men spending days on neighbourhood streets with little oversight, watching and often modelling violent behaviour. I then discuss James' experience of school, the threat of rejection and even exile to prison or a rehabilitation centre communicated by school authorities to young men involved in violence, and how this further undermines James' chances of having an adequate education or skills. I also discuss the constraints on the young men's chances of finding employment and their expectations in this regard. Finally, I describe how the geographic marginalisation of the majority under apartheid, which continues into the present, contributes to the lack of mobility and exposure to physical violence of boys and young men. The young men's stories concerning experiences of structural violence are interwoven with narratives of physical violence. These sections thus also explore the perceptions of physical violence implied by the narratives, as well as the mixed messages concerning the legitimacy of violence communicated by family, peers, neighbours, and school authorities to the young men with whom Chiedza spoke. They

²⁶ On this topic, see also, David Fryer and Bruce Hepburn, *"It's Jobs, Stupid!" Social Exclusion, Education, and the Informal Sector in Grahamstown, Fort Beaufort and Duncan Village* (Grahamstown: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 2010).

²⁷ Altbeker, *supra* n 6.

also show how physical violence is consistently connected to normative ideas about growing up to be a man. Finally, the narratives show how structural and physical violence are intimately linked.

Boyhood Role Models

James' description of his childhood begins with his father. Instead of discussing his early years, James skips to the time when his alienation from his father began, at about age seven, when they were living together and separated from James' mother and brothers, who were living in another area with James' grandparents. While he dismisses his father as unimportant in the follow-up conversation – "I don't even think of him most of the time" – it is telling that he immediately discusses his father, who "wasn't there for [him] when the time when [he] was growing up."²⁸ This inconsistency comes up again when James initially notes, "He was the one who was beating and shouting at me ... I can say he's the one that made me do all the things I have done," but later in the conversation says that his father had nothing to do with his behaviour – "It was not my dad ... it was me myself."²⁹ James portrays his father as disengaged and authoritarian – "We never talked but we lived in the same house. He would just tell me to do something and I do something and I'll go back to my room" – and violent when challenged – "If you don't listen to him, you'll sure get something out of him." Although he does not refer to his father's drinking in this description, his note that both his parents "were alcoholics"³⁰ at the very beginning of the narrative suggests that this may have played a role in his father's actions. Despite having a strong physical presence in James' childhood, James notes that his father metaphorically "wasn't there the time when I grew up to be next to me and teach me in what direction must I go."³¹ James does not perceive any guidance in his father's verbal abuse and physical violence and suggests that his father has nothing to do with his ideas about being a man.³² This distinguishes him from the other young men, who mention being "*klapped*" and beaten by family members when they were boys but do not describe this as violence but as normal and a form of guidance, even if unpleasant. In a group discussion, one young man notes that he intends to use corporal punishment when he becomes a father – "I'll kick him [the child] so that he knows what's wrong and what's right" – although the young men then also agree

²⁸ James, 3 February 2012.

²⁹ James, 26 October 2011.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ James, 3 February 2012.

³² Ibid.

that this violence will not be “extreme” and that it will be accompanied by “talking.”³³ I will discuss James’ reaction to his father’s violence below, but highlight here that James’ narratives repeatedly return to his father and offer conflicting and ambivalent messages concerning their relationship.

In contrast, James discusses his mother’s absence in an indirect way, even while linking why he “changed” into a gangster at around age 10 to not having his mother with him “all the time.”³⁴ His narrative about his mother is emotionally consistent – “She’s a loving person,”³⁵ and, “Some people fight with their mother ... I’m not a person like that with her, I can talk to her and ask her things, I love to help her”³⁶ – and yet vague. When Chiedza attempts to find out where his mother lives and what she does for a living with a series of follow-up questions, James is unclear and appears evasive, even while being open enough to admit to being possessive of her and not wanting men to be with her.³⁷ He also avoids any mention of the relationship between his mother and father, and whether the father’s violent and authoritative behaviour towards James had parallels to his behaviour towards the mother.

James’ experience of not growing up with both parents is not unusual in his area. As JB, a 29-year-old from Mfuleni, notes, “With almost all my friends ... it’s either they grew up with their mother, no father, they grew up with their father, no mother, or they grew up without both parents.”³⁸ If the parents are not separated, then one or both parents are away from the household most of the time, including weekends, often working in the informal sector, for example as domestic workers or street vendors.³⁹ As Altbeker points out, most of the new jobs created after the transition, between 1995 and 2003, were in the informal sector, and the sector has only grown since then.⁴⁰ Work in the informal sector, while it brings in money, does not offer the protections, longer-term security, predictable hours, and leave that usually come with formal employment.⁴¹ In

³³ Group discussion, 27 January 2012.

³⁴ James, 26 October 2011.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ James, 3 February 2012.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ JB, 30 November 2011.

³⁹ See, Vuyani, 30 November 2011.

⁴⁰ Altbeker, *supra* n 6. The definition of “informal” employment is contested, with many arguing that more people have informal work than reflected in standard statistical data. In either case, data released at the time James first spoke with Chiedza suggests that more than 30 percent of South Africa’s potential workforce is in the informal sector. See, Wiseman Khuzwayo, “Employment in Informal Sector Booms,” *Business Report*, 18 October 2011. See also, Hassan Essop and Derek Yu, *Alternative Definitions of Informal Sector Employment in South Africa* (Stellenbosch: Department of Economics and Bureau for Economic Research, University of Stellenbosch, 2008).

⁴¹ Fryer and Hepburn, *supra* n 26.

the context of high unemployment and the absence of regular jobs, particularly in the areas where James and his peers live, adults are forced to travel elsewhere for work, leaving their children home with other guardians, usually grandparents,⁴² and often limited oversight.⁴³ It is telling that James' family – both his father and his relatives whom he would visit – “for a few months ... did not notice” that he had joined a gang.⁴⁴ Even when such behaviour is noticed, parents and guardians working in the informal sector cannot, for example, appeal to an employer for time off to spend with their child. The choice between economic survival and child supervision is an obvious one.

Even if employed in the formal sector, the majority of South Africans work in low-skilled jobs, largely as a result of limited or inadequate education. For example, James' grandmother, Marah, states that she left school at the age of 12 (initially for informal domestic work) and after working for years as a cleaner is still in the same position. She has had to support an unemployed husband, as well as her children and grandchildren. James' mother, Natasha, has also had inconsistent informal and low-skilled jobs.⁴⁵ Given that “the quality of individual educational outcomes tend to run in families” and, as Seekings and Natrass suggest, inequality in terms of education and work skills is reproduced within families over time,⁴⁶ James is structurally positioned for a similar experience. A recent study notes that “whether a child lives in a township/informal settlement ... and education of the household head contribute the most to inequality of opportunity.”⁴⁷ It points out that the opportunity to finish primary school for children aged 13–15, not to mention secondary school, is highly constrained for children in these situations. In fact, James dropped out of school, although he later re-enrolled. Several of the other young men did the same, with a few still out of school.

Education, family employment histories, and where one lives – in other words factors over which people generally have little control in South Africa – also affect a person's chances of finding work, with young people in poor urban areas facing increasing obstacles in an economy oriented

⁴² When asked who he feels closest to, James talks about his grandmother: “It's my grandmother, because I look up to her.” James, 3 February 2012. JB also talks about his grandmother: “Sad memories ... in my childhood, it was losing my grandmother ... I grew up under her so, *ja*, that's one saddest moment.” JB, 30 November 2011. Another young man from Mfuleni states, “My role model is my grandfather.” Andile, 29 November 2011.

⁴³ Studies suggest that what is referred to as “unsupervised time” supports “risk behaviour” in young people, including violence, law breaking, and abuse of alcohol and other substances. See, for example, HSRC, *supra* n 8.

⁴⁴ James, 26 October 2011.

⁴⁵ Marah, 16 March 2012.

⁴⁶ Altbeker, *supra* n 6 at 31.

⁴⁷ International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank (WB), *South Africa Economic Update: Focus on Inequality of Opportunity* (July 2012), x.

towards high-skilled jobs.⁴⁸ Uncertainty regarding employment and some awareness of these obstacles is reflected in the narratives. Asked about the future, James talks about wanting to be a pilot, which appears a distant dream considering the costs involved in getting the hours of flight time required for a pilot's license, beyond the cost and effort involved in just the application process. Young men in a group discussion met a question regarding what kind of job they would like with silence and exchanged looks, and the eventual answers ranged from having any kind of office job to dealing drugs to being a delivery man *cum* getaway driver.⁴⁹ Overall, the narratives do not touch much on future employment beyond helping relatives with their informal work, especially among the young men who have been or still are involved in gangsterism.⁵⁰

After describing his family life, James talks about growing up in his neighbourhood. James' narrative suggests that the gap in caregiver oversight mentioned above can be filled by people in the neighbourhood who are not relatives. These are usually men and particularly young men, who serve as passive role models but also discipline boys when they commit a "wrong." James mentions that he was taught about being a man mainly by the "uncles" in his neighbourhood, although he does not specify whether this was through active conversation or through watching them.⁵¹ The theme of young boys "watching," observing young men in their neighbourhoods recurs in James' narratives, as well as those of his peers. James talks about how he and his friends "used to see the guys that were older" who "used to walk around and they used to fight, and we liked to follow them and watch."⁵² Eric, a 16-year-old from Gugulethu, tells a story about being disciplined by a young gangster from his neighbourhood at the age of about seven or eight: "He *klapped* me. Why is he beating me? This *tsotsi* says he hit me because I urinated in the yard."⁵³

As a boy, James looked up to the young men in his neighbourhood, most of whom lived "in the same street" as him, and much of what he says he admired is linked to their fighting. James notes that when he became a young man, and a gangster, "these boys that are my – 11 years old, 12 years old – now they looked up to me." Being admitted to the gang through serious violence – he "stabbed a boy in the throat" and "sent him into a coma" – made him feel like a "superstar." This

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Group discussion, 17 August 2012.

⁵⁰ Two of the young men who participated in community centre activities in Mfuleni now have part-time work helping with such activities at their centres.

⁵¹ James, 3 February 2012.

⁵² James, 26 October 2011. See also, Eric, 26 October 2011; JB, 30 November 2011.

⁵³ Eric, 26 October 2011. A *tsotsi* is a gangster or streetwise hoodlum.

feeling is directly connected to the boys' emulation. In addition, James says that the first time young men "saw" him was when he committed this violence.⁵⁴ His choice of language is interesting. As a boy, James "watched" the neighbourhood's young men. The first time he was "seen" by these young men and presumably started being "watched" by the boys was when he committed an act of serious violence. Being visible is linked to growing from a boy into a young man, and being visible begins with being violent.

Violence in Streets and Schools

As James' narrative enters his school days, it becomes increasingly ambivalent about the violence he has committed. James talks about fighting with young men at school as being done in service of other boys, who, for example, get robbed in school. He quotes the boys as saying that they "love" what he does because the rivals "don't give us the freedom that we must have at school."⁵⁵ Here, James portrays himself as a man who can stand up for himself and for others, and although the "boys" whom he protected at school must have been nearer to his age, his language at this point echoes the language he uses when describing the young boys who "looked up" to him in the neighbourhood. Again, James communicates that growing up is demonstrated through violence.

While appearing to take pride in his ability to fight in the neighbourhood and at school, James also rejects his violence and regrets the things he did when he was at his "most vilest." He talks about violence as repetitive and exhausting, noting that his school days were not "the best" for him because it was "every day fighting, fighting. 'Cause it's just fighting, fighting, fighting, fighting." Yet, this statement follows directly on him noting, "It was quite nice for me in high school." James signals a fundamental ambivalence about violence and his role in it. He views physical violence as manly and heroic at the same time that he views it as "wrong," pointless, and something for which to seek redemption, to "correct."⁵⁶

Some clues as to the root of this ambivalence may be found in the narratives of James' mother and grandmother, as well as of his peers. These narratives show that some forms of violence are considered legitimate and useful while other forms are considered illegitimate and harmful. James' mother, Natasha, distinguishes between violence done in a "respectable manner"

⁵⁴ James, 26 October 2011.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

and that done in a “terrible and drastic” way that is “hurtful, harmful.” The respectable violence is done “at night or in a room where nobody can see it” and beatings administered “where you won’t see the marks and bruises.” Natasha emphasises that “fighting is, was never good” but goes on to insist that it is possible to have “respectable” violence.⁵⁷ James’ grandmother, Marah, argues that violence has gotten out of hand because adults are not allowed to discipline children like they used to, through corporal punishment at school and in the home: “Children just do what they want to do.”⁵⁸ In his narrative, James states that his mother and grandmother are the ones who have offered him guidance in life: Natasha “encourages me where I went wrong to do right”⁵⁹ and Marah “made me put bad things aside and look in the right direction.”⁶⁰ He also views this type of guidance as a maternal quality, noting that his long-term girlfriend is “like a mother” because she has encouraged him to change his life.⁶¹ From early on, then, James has been receiving mixed messages about violence from people he listens to, from the main maternal figures in his life: that it is never good and yet that it can be the right thing to do. The two women do not directly discuss whether they have physically disciplined their children; the more important fact is that they send particular messages about legitimate violence.

The 16-year-old Eric describes how maternal figures may at times legitimise gang violence. Describing the dangers of straying onto another neighbourhood gang’s territory in Gugulethu, he notes, “If you run to that house on that side [of the area], those women kick you out. They tell you that our children die that side, so you, it’s a must you die here ... because you also kill their children.”⁶² In this case, adult women condone the revenge logic of gang violence, where one gang is in charge of its territory and protects it from gangs from other areas, usually close by, with each attack avenged by the other side. JB describes this logic when talking about a friend’s murder: “It was their enemies, they spotted him ... he’s done that to some of them, shot some of them, so now

⁵⁷ Natasha, 16 March 2012. Asked about physical violence in general, although the question was weighted towards public violence, Natasha ends up speaking about what sounds like domestic violence. While the violence among young men may differ from violence within a family home, with the distinction linked to the extent to which the violence is (and is desired to be) “seen” and “watched,” the main point here is the notion that violence can be “respectable.”

⁵⁸ Marah, 16 March 2012.

⁵⁹ James, 26 October 2011.

⁶⁰ James, 3 February 2012.

⁶¹ James, 26 October 2011. The scope of this piece does not allow for discussion of the young men’s relationships to and with girls their age, although the narratives are rich in this regard and invite future engagement.

⁶² Eric, 26 October 2011.

it was their turn to, so he died on the spot.”⁶³ Eric says, “When you get caught, they kill you, even us, when we catch you, we kill you.”⁶⁴ It is important to note that it is not only young men, particularly gangsters, who influence each other’s thinking about legitimate violence. While studies indicate that young men in poor areas, particularly those with limited oversight, have a lot of free time to spend with friends and are highly influenced by their peer group,⁶⁵ the narratives here emphasise that they are taught about the legitimacy of violence from early on, particularly by adult women in their lives. Furthermore, the young men suggest that some women family members tacitly support their gang activities, mainly by accepting food acquired with stolen funds or the funds themselves.⁶⁶

Even in denouncing the violence of their children, women can communicate that violence is justified. In James’ narrative, his family’s discovery of his involvement in a gang leads to rejection, starting at age 10: “Our relationship at home changed dramatically. They didn’t want to give me money to buy me stuff like clothes. They didn’t want me to sleep in the house because they thought I maybe steal the things in the house and go sell them for my own goods.”⁶⁷ Xolani, an 18-year-old also from Gugulethu, similarly notes, “My mother was ignoring me now that I was a gangster ... I was told that I must fend for myself ... She did not take me as her own child. Like, I am her child, but she was not buying me stuff [like clothing]. I must fight for myself, you see, even these things.”⁶⁸ While this form of discipline sends a moral message, it at the same time fosters violence, communicating that the young men should use any means to get clothing and other things they need and that, through violence, they are able to fend for themselves. In a roundabout way, growing up from a boy into a young man is again linked to violence here.

The role and messages of older men as regards violence are similarly conflicted in the narratives. The narratives differ significantly in terms of the young men’s relationships with their

⁶³ JB, 30 November 2011.

⁶⁴ Eric, 26 October 2011.

⁶⁵ HSRC, supra n 8.

⁶⁶ Group discussion, 27 January 2012. Discussing the relationship between young men in informal gangs and adult women in Manenberg, a township near Gugulethu that was previously classified as Coloured, Elaine Salo notes that women “actively denied” crimes or violence these young men committed outside their neighbourhood but would push “the gang leader to identify and punish the offender severely” when such behaviour occurred within the neighbourhood. Elaine Salo, “Negotiating Gender and Personhood in the New South Africa: Adolescent Women and Gangsters in Manenberg Township on the Cape Flats,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 6(3) (2003): 351–352.

⁶⁷ James, 26 October 2011.

⁶⁸ Xolani, 26 October 2011.

fathers and older male relatives, more so than with their mothers and older female relatives. As guiding figures, men are mentioned less than women, particularly by the young men who have been involved in gangsterism. When older men are mentioned in relation to violence, it is often as peacemaking authorities over the young gangsters and as wielders of legitimate violence. For example, in the same thread of his story where Eric describes how older women foster gang violence, he says: “This man of that house says, ‘No, man, stop this thing you are doing.’ You see, it depends if in that house what do we do. Or we take him out of the house, or maybe the man of the house is not there ... we go there, we take him out, and we stab that boy.” The “man of the house” can stop the young men from fighting each other: “This man comes out and shout that ‘No, you cannot kill this child in my house.’” This links to Eric’s childhood experience of being beaten by a gangster: when his father came home, he told the gangster, “No, don’t hit children here.” At the same time, Eric suggests that his father “hit” the gangster.⁶⁹ Older men, even though they are not gangsters, appear to hold authority over young men, at least within the space of the household, and their violence is not described as being met with the type of revenge violence that would be meted out to other young men. This relationship between young and older men, and the ideas about becoming a man that are suggested by this relationship, will be discussed below.

In addition to other young men and older men and women, the narratives suggest that strong messages about violence emerge from school authorities. Studies show the high prevalence of violence in South African schools,⁷⁰ and all of the narratives support this picture. A compelling aspect of this experience that emerges through the narratives is that school authorities either do not “notice” that young men are involved in violence or reject and marginalise them when they do notice in a way that echoes the rejection in their families described above. James notes that despite the “fighting, fighting, fighting, fighting” he did every day in school, his teacher “didn’t know.” James says, “When I was in class I was just busy with my schoolwork. I made sure that I didn’t want no one to know – no teacher, principal and the security that was securing the school grounds – that I was part and one of the big guys in the gang. I knew that if they knew they would’ve dropped me out of school at that time or maybe sent me to prison or to a rehab centre or something like that.” When he finally was caught fighting and believed the authorities’ attitude to be, ““We must do

⁶⁹ Eric, 26 October 2011.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Patrick Burton, *Merchants, Skollies and Stones: Experiences of School Violence in South Africa* (Cape Town: Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2008).

something about you,” he did not return to school day after day until he had effectively dropped out.⁷¹ This appears to be related to his fear that rather than engaging with him, the authorities would send him away to prison or for rehabilitation. Eric talks about being expelled from school after stabbing a classmate, also a young gangster. He notes that he had attempted to get the teacher’s attention when the fight was brewing – “this teacher did not take me seriously.” He then gives a confused account of how his school records have been lost by the school authorities so that he cannot enrol in another school.⁷² Xolani tells a similar story about his school decreeing that he “must go” to a vocational school, which resulted in him dropping out of school entirely because he could not get the right documentation from his old school or afford to pay his new school’s fees. In both cases, the school authorities appear not to have provided adequate information, guidance, or even services.

JB, describing the principal of his school, notes, “She hated me, she wanted nothing to do with me,” because he was involved in gangsterism. When he began spending time with three “brilliant” learners who were not involved in gangsterism, JB says, “[The principal] wanted me not to become friends with them because I’m gonna spoil them. She kept on calling them, ‘Guys, I don’t want you near that boy, I do not want you near him. He’s not right for you, he’s trouble for you.’” JB’s use of the word “spoil” suggests that he viewed the principal as believing that gangsterism and the willingness to do violence implies a permanent change, that a young man is ruined and unworthy of any further attention from the school once he crosses that line. JB was placed in a class composed entirely of violent offenders: “I was in a boys’ class and, funny enough, I was the youngest ... 20 people in one class, very naughty. Most of them were coming back from jail, they’d been arrested ... [for] robbery, murder, guns, you know, different kinds of things. Now they coming back to school, so it’s like I’m in prison serving with these people.”⁷³ JB describes being written off by the school authorities and left to fend for himself. If a young man drops out of school in reaction to such marginalisation or another reason, not only are his life chances seriously affected but he also ends up spending far more time in his neighbourhood. As Xolani says, “I am no longer at

⁷¹ James, 26 October 2011.

⁷² Eric, 26 October 2011.

⁷³ JB, 30 November 2011.

school. Even now I am sitting at home only, sitting in the township. I am doing nothing.”⁷⁴ After dropping out of school, James also began spending all day on a corner in his neighbourhood.

Sitting in the Neighbourhood

The repeated theme of “watching” young men described above points to the lack of mobility of boys and young men in these areas. James’ narratives do not mention life outside of his area. When not in school, the boys play “in the street,” until late at night, and entertain themselves in part by watching the older guys in their neighbourhood.⁷⁵ The young men, when they are not in school or after school, also spend their days in the neighbourhood with their friends. When asked to describe an average day in his life when he was a gangster, James says, “I would wake up, go outside, sit on the corner, maybe, um, ask people for money. If I don’t get money I would rob people, obviously. Now, if I get that money, I would just sit with my friends, call my friends, ‘Come and sit with me.’ We drink, we smoke ganja. That’s until the end of the day.”⁷⁶ The mobility of young gangsters is further constrained by the threat of leaving their neighbourhoods and straying while on their way elsewhere onto the territory of rival gangs, where “it is clear that you are an enemy” and risk being stabbed or shot.⁷⁷ This demonstrates that rival gangsters in surrounding areas tend to know each other by sight and that most of the “male–male assaults” described in the narratives occur between acquaintances.⁷⁸

Life outside of the townships, even visits to other areas of Cape Town, is rarely mentioned by the young men discussed here. James makes no mention in either of his conversations with Chiedza of ever leaving his neighbourhood, and only refers to another area when noting that his mother works in Cape Town. This in itself is telling, as he does not say “town,” as in the centre of town, but “Cape Town,” as if it is a different city.⁷⁹ Talk of life in other areas only emerges in the narratives of older adults, such as James’ mother and grandmother.⁸⁰ It is mainly in the absence of discussion of real life in other areas, beyond what is seen on television, such as James’ current role model, footballer Lionel Messi, that the lack of mobility young men face is strongly revealed. When

⁷⁴ Xolani, 26 October 2011.

⁷⁵ James, 26 October 2011; Marah, 16 March 2012.

⁷⁶ James, 3 February 2012.

⁷⁷ Eric, 26 October 2011. Also, Xolani, 26 October 2011; JB, 30 November 2011.

⁷⁸ Bruce, *supra* n 5 at 47.

⁷⁹ James, 3 February 2012.

⁸⁰ Natasha, 16 March 2012; Marah, 16 March 2012.

asked in a follow-up group discussion when they last left their neighbourhoods, the young men present noted that it had been years, with one mentioning 2009 and another 2006.⁸¹

This lack of mobility may have a number of causes, but the main one implied in the narratives is the absence of money, which makes the long journey into town or out of the township areas expensive or unfeasible unless it is done for work or in search of work.⁸² This explanation is undermined, however, by the narratives of James and the other young men who are or were involved in gangsterism, which describe regularly acquiring money through muggings and robberies, in addition to the more common means of receiving it from family members, “asking people [in the neighbourhood] for money, or collecting scrap [metal to sell].”⁸³ According to the narratives, this money is usually used for “buying clothes” and “drinking and smoking, smoking marijuana” or “mandrax, *tik*, and rock” while hanging out with friends in the neighbourhood.⁸⁴ The sense that emerges from the narratives, as suggested by James’ mention of Cape Town, is that the young men are turned inward upon their neighbourhoods and view their lives as delimited by the borders of these areas. The rest of the city, particularly outside the townships, appears as another world, one of outsiders to the neighbourhood.

This in part reflects the apartheid-era structuring of cities into zones for specific racial groups, under which policy people classified as African, Coloured, or Indian were either constrained to or forcibly removed to newly created “townships” and “suburbs” distant from, and with limited access and transport to, the city centre. These areas did not parallel life in the predominantly White centre, as they had inadequate infrastructure, smaller and lower-quality housing, crowded conditions, and limited access to schools, clinics, and other public services, particularly as the population grew over the years. Since the transition to democratic government, people are no longer forced by law to live in these areas, where conditions mostly remain dire; however, the vast majority of families categorised as not White under apartheid have remained in the areas, and even neighbourhoods, where they were moved or where they settled because other longer-term residents were family members or people they knew, and where they can afford to live. The demographics of most areas in Cape Town have not changed significantly since the transition, and while some previously White areas now have residents of other races and previously African and

⁸¹ Group discussion, 17 August 2012.

⁸² As with the young men’s parents, who are forced to work in other areas.

⁸³ James, 3 February 2012.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* Mandrax, *tik*, and rock are, respectively, an illegal sleeping pill, methamphetamine, and crack cocaine.

Coloured areas now have comparatively wealthy neighbourhoods, the markers of class are intertwined with those of race in determining where and how people live.⁸⁵ Recent research indicates that people living in poor urban areas have significantly fewer employment opportunities in South Africa and yet also fewer chances of leaving them in search of employment due to “cost considerations, (lack of) social networks, and cultural and family ties.”⁸⁶

The legacies of apartheid policies and the continuing socioeconomic marginalisation of the majority of South Africa’s population are also indicated by where people feel comfortable living and in their relationships with insiders and outsiders to their neighbourhoods – in their intimate, everyday lives. This is particularly the case with young people like James, who have not experienced the mobility required of working adults. As researchers working with adolescents in another area of Cape Town have noted, “Long-standing familial associations and current economic restrictions mean that young people largely move in physical and social spheres distinct to their neighbourhood and its history.”⁸⁷ The reasons for their families living in areas with substandard infrastructure and services, as well as their own economic constraints, are not mentioned by James and his peers. What is mentioned is everyday physical violence, but this also is viewed by insiders as a fact of life, one balanced by the positive social aspects of living in the neighbourhood, as is life in any area. As Vuyani, a 23-year-old from Mfuleni, notes, “I cannot say Khayelitsha is the worst place, you know, I cannot say Khayelitsha is ... not a place to be because, you know, *ja*, well, I live there.”⁸⁸ This statement, in light of the general discussion, suggests three dynamics: the structural violence inherent in living in inadequately serviced areas, with its policy roots, is largely invisible to the young men Chiedza spoke with; this violence is both reflected in and masked by a sense of belonging to and history with such areas that is born of familial connections and neighbourhood relationships; and life in such areas is not all about violence, even if it may be perceived that way by outsiders, as the violence coexists with the other aspects of social life, peaceful and otherwise.

While life in the neighbourhood can be familiar and comfortable, it can have a price. The narratives suggest that people in a neighbourhood, young and older, know each other and have reputations. This can lead to young men being suspected of violence and gangsterism even if they

⁸⁵ See, for example, Mamphela Ramphele, *Laying Ghosts to Rest: Dilemmas of the Transformation in South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2008); Seekings and Natrass, *supra* n 25.

⁸⁶ WB, *supra* n 47 at xi.

⁸⁷ See, Bray et al., *supra* n 23 at 167.

⁸⁸ Vuyani, 30 November 2011.

are not involved in or are attempting to leave that life, particularly if they spend their days sitting around in the neighbourhood. Xolani notes, "It is not right to sit in the township. You end up being accused about things you did not do."⁸⁹ Vuyani participates in this typecasting, stating that he knew some guys were gangsters because "in the townships there's normally guys that you'll find sitting in, in a corner ... choking [smoking marijuana] the whole day."⁹⁰ Xolani eventually describes a vigilante attack that occurred in his area and suggests that it could happen to him: "They are beating you and you die, you see, then, for things that do not exist."⁹¹ Stories like this, as well as one Eric tells of not being able to avoid violence even by staying at home all day,⁹² suggest that the line between public and private spaces in the neighbourhoods is blurred. In a sense, young men are always being "watched," not only by boys but also by other young men and by adults. The attitude of neighbours can be mirrored by the police, increasing the vulnerability of the young men. The police may detain a number of young men on a corner in their search for crime suspects, assuming that they are gangsters simply because of the way they look or have chosen to spend that particular day.⁹³ Time in detention or under arrest presents the risk of violence at the hands of police. The police force is also often brutal in its dealings with neighbourhood gangs, given public pressure to control crime and to assert its authority in the face of gang violence.⁹⁴ Speaking about the police, Xolani states, "They are sometimes the ones who sell us out."⁹⁵ He tells a story about asking the police for help when he was being chased by rival gang members. The police gave him a ride in their van but did not take him to his own area, instead dropping him off in another area and telling him to "run." He was attacked again and beaten by rival gangsters. The majority of young men in Xolani's area risk the hostility and violence of neighbours and the police either because of their membership in a gang or simply because they spend their days sitting in the neighbourhood.

⁸⁹ Xolani, 26 October 2011.

⁹⁰ Vuyani, 30 November 2011.

⁹¹ Xolani, 26 October 2011. See also the Violence and Transition project component on vigilantism: Kylie Thomas, *The Power of Naming: "Senseless Violence" and Violent Law in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Cape Town: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation and Centre for Humanities Research, 2012).

⁹² Eric, 26 October 2011.

⁹³ See, Malose Langa and Modiegi Merafe, *Profiling Torture and CIDT in the Hands of the Police: A Case Study of Kagiso Township, Gauteng* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2011). This approach was also taken by police under apartheid.

⁹⁴ Amanda Dissel, Steffen Jensen, and Sandra Roberts, *Torture in South Africa: Exploring Torture and Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment through the Media* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2009).

⁹⁵ Xolani, 26 October 2011.

Individual Agency: Becoming a Man

All of the young men Chiedza spoke with imply that being a gangster, with the serious violence that attends it, is an almost unavoidable norm in their areas. Even those who have not been in a gang view gangsterism and even death as a matter of “there but for the grace of God go I.” The language they use to describe how they took a different path – mainly that they were careful about the friends they chose and that those in gangs made “bad choices” – is remarkably similar and suggests the influence of the community associations they joined in boyhood, but beyond such comments these young men’s narratives imply a far less clear-cut separation from their gangster peers and the significant role of good luck in their staying out of gangs.

The young men discuss the violent deaths of many of their peers and friends as a result of gangsterism, as James does when he describes the murders of young men he considered his “best friends.” Eric says, “Life in the township ... there is stabbing and such, that one is robbing and such, you see. There will be time that, okay, you stab each other.”⁹⁶ JB notes, because of the prevalence of gangsterism in certain areas, “If I had not moved from Langa to Khayelitsha [as a small child] maybe I would be late [dead] as well.”⁹⁷ Njabulo, a 33-year-old from Mfuleni says, “I was wanted ... by gangster,” but, “fortunately,” Njabulo happened to live directly across from a community centre and was drawn into its activities, even though “we were reluctant, man.”⁹⁸

Vuyani directly connects gangsterism and violence to masculinity among young men, and masculinity to death. He describes how he was called a “*moffie*” (man perceived as effeminate) for not being violent and then says, “Some of the guys who were passing those comments, they no longer alive, you know, because they made that choice [to be gangsters], and now I’m thinking, *ne*, what if I stuck to them.”⁹⁹ Xolani also notes that people might think, “He is a homosexual,” because he no longer wants to be involved in violence.¹⁰⁰ Eric says that it is almost impossible not to get involved because when you return to your neighbourhood after being in a “normal” fight over a boyhood taunt, the young men argue that you now have to retaliate and humiliate you if do not concede: “It is that thing now makes you all the time you want to fight, because these boys, if you don’t do something, they treat you hard.” Because of this neighbourhood pressure, he states, “We

⁹⁶ Eric, 26 October 2011.

⁹⁷ JB, 30 November 2011.

⁹⁸ Njabulo, 1 December 2011.

⁹⁹ Vuyani, 30 November 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Xolani, 26 October 2011.

were forced into gangster ... [The gangsters] tell you that, 'No, my man, there's no other way, my friend, wake up, we have to fight with them. My friend, we will work with you.'" Eric goes on to say that he once tried staying in his room to avoid fighting and spending less time hanging out, but that he would nonetheless be drawn into violence by his friends. If his own friends did not draw him in, then young men from other gangs who knew him would eventually do it. According to Eric, "No, gangster, no, it's difficult. You can't stop, you can't stop." Suggesting how all-encompassing the area violence seems, he also states, "In the end, there is no person who can come out in this thing, brother, because, hey-no, many guys have died, and many of their guys have died."¹⁰¹ Violence and masculinity are intimately linked in the narratives, even though violence carries the constant threat of death in the neighbourhoods.

These narratives go beyond discussing peer pressure (although that is present as well: "Those kids get to smoke when they get to high school so that they can be cool, so that they can join the gang, 'Okay, I want to be like this gang so they are smoking, you see, I must smoke'"¹⁰²); they are describing the everyday ordinariness of getting involved in gangsterism as a young man, of beating, stabbing, and shooting and of being murdered, which is so normal that not being involved appears the unusual phenomenon. James twice refers to handing down the experience of being in a gang to the next generation of boys becoming young men, noting, "We gave it to the youngsters that are growing up now so they can experience what we experienced at the age."¹⁰³ He speaks of leaving the gangs as of passing the torch, to the next bunch of boys who spent their childhoods "watching" the young men in their neighbourhood, looking up to them, and being taught, disciplined, and protected by them. When asked what he would say to a young boy in his area who has not yet been on the path of violence, Xolani says, "I would suggest that he must never do that, like try these things I've tried, to never be naughty, he must never. But I know that he will never want to hear what I am saying. He will jump over [not listen to] me and he will eventually see."¹⁰⁴ To Xolani, every boy wants to and has to have a taste of gangsterism and its violence.

Aligned with the sense of the inevitability of violence in the narratives are suggestions of a lack of agency. In addition to messages that not being involved in gangsterism is a matter of luck, the young men who have been violent often note that they do not know how it happens. James

¹⁰¹ Eric, 26 October 2011.

¹⁰² Andile, 29 November 2011.

¹⁰³ James, 26 October 2011.

¹⁰⁴ Xolani, 26 October 2011.

says, “I didn’t know why was I fighting. I just fought because this group, they fought with other groups.”¹⁰⁵ Describing how he keeps being drawn into knife fights, Xolani insists, “I never became a gangster, I stopped being a gangster, you see. But other people maybe they have a grudge against me, I don’t know.”¹⁰⁶ Eric notes, “You see, it does not help this thing to, okay, you don’t stab someone when they are stabbing you and they caught you ... it has to be life and death.”¹⁰⁷ Lack of a sense of agency is also communicated in the self-infantilising language the young men use to describe their violence. Asked to define violence, Xolani says, “To be rude, like being naughty. What you do, you stab people. Anything, man, that is mischievous.”¹⁰⁸ Many of the young men repeatedly use the word “naughty” for serious violence.¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, James’ grandmother also uses this language, describing her “naughty children,” including James.¹¹⁰

These suggestions of lack of agency and of naughtiness are important for two reasons: first, because some of the young men who are involved in violence perceive themselves to some extent as subject to social authorities and rules outside their control, much like soldiers, despite only being in small, informal neighbourhood gangs, and, second, because their descriptions of becoming and being an adult man, including in relation to violence, are far more agentic. The first dynamic comes through strongly in JB’s narrative. Describing running with his gang in school, JB states, “They were living with orders, so I had to follow those orders, you know. I had to ‘cause I was very hyper ... I think about this, I do this now, okay, I don’t think twice. But now, when I was in class with them, I had to think before I do ... If I do something that is not right, they call me, they punish me.” James had a “boss” in the gang, to whom he had to prove what he “was capable of doing when working with them in a gang.” James says he got in fights simply “because this group, they fought with other groups.”¹¹¹ In addition, JB notes that the serious violence that takes place between rival gangs is reserved for gangsters and excludes others.¹¹² In fact, these young gangsters often take on the role of protecting their neighbourhoods. For example, Eric tells a story about being shot at while robbing an older woman in another neighbourhood because he did not listen to a local gangster’s warning

¹⁰⁵ James, 26 October 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Xolani, 26 October 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Eric, 26 October 2011.

¹⁰⁸ Xolani, 26 October 2011.

¹⁰⁹ JB, 30 November 2011; Xolani, 26 October 2011; Eric, 26 October 2011; Vuyani, 30 November 2011.

¹¹⁰ Marah, 16 March 2012.

¹¹¹ James, 26 October 2011. Salo, *supra* n 66, refers to the responsibility gang leaders in Manenberg take for the actions of their gang members, which the community also expects.

¹¹² JB, 30 November 2011.

to leave her alone: “This guy says we must leave this old lady.”¹¹³ In a group discussion, the young men noted that they would not attack people from their own neighbourhood.¹¹⁴ Even cases where violence between informal gangs spreads to people outside the gangs can be seen as examples of the way informal gangs are embedded in their neighbourhoods, as demonstrated in a recent case of young gangsters in Khayelitsha entering a rival gang’s territory and indiscriminately attacking people in the streets while searching for their rivals, seeing the neighbourhood residents as connected to, representative of, and supportive towards their local gang.¹¹⁵ Such incidents as well as the young men’s narratives give credence to Altbeker’s assertion that “most violence in South Africa generates little if any material reward.”¹¹⁶ While this may change upon entering a formal gang, the young men Chiedza spoke with have participated in informal gang violence because of the social significance of being “watched” and “seen” and of belonging in the neighbourhood, because they are part of a larger whole and “soldiers,” not because of any noteworthy material rewards. In this light, the chaotic fighting described in the narratives appears more logical, and even disciplined. It also demonstrates the gangs’ territoriality and responsibility for protecting their neighbourhoods.

When the young men begin talking about leaving the gangs, the narratives shift remarkably. They become about taking on personal agency, which is explicitly connected to growing up to be a man. Eric puts it starkly: “When I grow up ... if I am big, now I stop all these things of being a gangster.”¹¹⁷ Xolani, talking about his decision to stop being violent, argues, “If you don’t think, someone will take decisions on your behalf ... It’s me who will know how my household runs, must change ... I’m the man in my family, it’s me who looks after the home.”¹¹⁸ The language shifts from submitting to the authority of a “boss” or a gang to becoming an authority in oneself and within a family. James notes, “[Many former gangsters] took a step back from these things ‘cause we gave it to the youngsters that are growing up now so they can experience what we experienced at the age.” He gives the reason as, “I think they [former gangsters] see that the things that they have done wrong doesn’t benefit them, they don’t get nothing out of it.”¹¹⁹ Here, the emphasis is on the self and on making a decision to turn away from violence for the good of oneself and one’s family,

¹¹³ Eric, 26 October 2011.

¹¹⁴ Group discussion, 17 August 2012.

¹¹⁵ See, Aziz Hartley and Xolani Koyana, “Armed Gang Wreaks Havoc in Cape,” *Cape Times*, 30 July 2012.

¹¹⁶ Altbeker, *supra* n 6 at 4.

¹¹⁷ Eric, 26 October 2011.

¹¹⁸ Xolani, 26 October 2011.

¹¹⁹ James, 26 October 2011.

as opposed to the group or the neighbourhood. In a group conversation, several of the young men agree that they would change when they became men, noting that the shift begins “when you have come from the bush ... when you come back from initiation school.”¹²⁰ A few of the young men also refer to initiation in their conversations with Chiedza, but they rarely explicitly link their thoughts on adult manhood to what they occasionally refer to as “African culture” in their narratives, rather using the neighbourhood as their main reference point.¹²¹ The reference to initiation nonetheless highlights the perceived difference between being a young man and an adult.

As he enters his 20s, James views informal gangsterism and the repetitive, daily violence it entails as the domain of younger men. In effect, it is a rite of passage. This idea is also communicated in narratives that concern older men, discussed above. While violence is still part of an adult man’s experience, that violence is perceived as agentic and more legitimate as well as authoritative than the violence of young men. This discussion places James’ inconsistent, ambivalent, yet repeated references to his father in a new light. James describes his father’s continual violence and oppressive presence while he was growing up but points out that his father never offered him guidance as to what was right or wrong, or “in what direction must I go.”¹²² In saying that his father taught him nothing about being a man, James indicates that his father’s unprincipled violence was not only illegitimate but also, importantly, unmanly. Because it did not carry messages of guidance or protection, this adult man’s violence was empty, devoid of meaning and manly authority.¹²³ As James transitions into adulthood and leaves behind the automatic violence of young manhood, his thoughts circle around the models for adult manhood in his life and appear to return to the negative lessons learnt from his father. Asked how he sees himself in 10 years and whether he imagines he will be like his father, he declares, “I’ll be a different person, not like my dad.”¹²⁴ This implies that he will be a different person from his young self as well as a different person from his father.

¹²⁰ Group discussion, 27 January 2012.

¹²¹ For discussion on how cultural norms shape conceptions of masculinity as well as a more in-depth analysis of constructions of masculinities among this group of young men, see, Chiedza Chagutah, *“Violence Means to Be Rude, Being Naughty ... Like Stabbing People”: Masculinity/ies and Violence in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Cape Town: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation and Centre for Humanities Research, 2013).

¹²² James, 3 February 2012.

¹²³ As mentioned above, James’ experience stands in contrast to the narratives of his peers, most of whom have been “*klapped*” or beaten by family members but view this form of violence as legitimate and well-intentioned, or normal.

¹²⁴ James, 26 October 2011.

The notion that growing up and becoming a man entails taking on more agency suggests that violence among men below 23 years of age – when South Africans are most likely to be a victim and a perpetrator of violent crime¹²⁵ – needs to be discussed and addressed differently from the violence of men above that age, such as the perpetrators of violent crime interviewed for CSVV's 2007–2010 study.¹²⁶ The gendered nature of the narratives of James and the other young men also supports David Bruce's calls for further study into "male–male assaults," particularly between young men who know each other. In the previous sections, I have attempted to do just this: to examine how young men perceive physical violence and how their perceptions are shaped by messages concerning violence they receive from their male and female family members, their peers, and their neighbours. The next section will further discuss the structural violence that shadows the narratives, how it is perceived by James and the others, and how this violence may be addressed.

Beyond Individualisation and Generalisation: Understanding the Reproduction of Physical and Structural Violence

The intergenerational character of gangsterism and violence comes through in the narratives and is represented in the theme of boys "watching." Just as 20-year-old James describes being a boy and watching the young men fight in his neighbourhood, 33-year-old Njabulo talks about "witnessing" the way gangsters "were fighting, they were shooting each other" in his boyhood in the 1980s. Njabulo also describes watching a different form of violence: "When we were growing up, we would witness, you know, the *toyi-toying* ... we would go watch at times people are stoning Whites' company cars and stuff like that, you know, furniture shops, cars."¹²⁷ Sibusiso, a 40-year-old man from Gugulethu whose narrative is presented in another component of the Violence and Transition project,¹²⁸ describes being told by a liberation force commander living in his neighbourhood, "Now we [the boys] are the, you know, the watchers of the community ... Every time he heard a gunshot

¹²⁵ As discussed above. See, Leoschut and Bonora, *supra* n 10.

¹²⁶ HSRC, *supra* n 8.

¹²⁷ Njabulo, 1 December 2011.

¹²⁸ Godfrey Maringira, *Ex-Combatants in South Africa* (Cape Town: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation and Centre for Humanities Research, 2013).

we must go out and make sure that we see who's firing and we know who."¹²⁹ The implications of Sibusiso's role as a watcher are not only that he would be invisible because this is what boys did in the 1980s – watch political and everyday violence unfold, as Njabulo's narrative suggests – but also that it was acceptable for boys to be exposed to incidents like shootings precisely because it was a norm, despite the risk of trauma. Boys in Cape Town's townships have been growing up watching serious violence for decades; the 1994 transition and nearly 20 years of democracy have not changed this reality.¹³⁰

Asked what makes people in her area violent, James' mother says, "In some particular cases you can say it's the way they were brought up, the violence they have experienced themselves and even in the communities. They see this stuff, they grow up with it, and they think it's normal to hurt the next person."¹³¹ Natasha echoes the theme of watching, noting that people "see" the violence in their everyday lives growing up. She also suggests that this everyday exposure normalises violence to them as children, as young people, and as the adults they eventually become, pointing to the intergenerational reproduction of violence as well as researchers' findings on the psychosocial influence of family, peers, and environment on individuals, which shapes the type of behaviour they view as legitimate or acceptable.¹³² A telling aspect of Natasha's explanation is that it comes as a negative response to Chiedza's question whether the violence is linked to the 1994 transition and frustration concerning the absence of socioeconomic change. Natasha says, "It could be, *ja*, it could be, but I won't say that that's the main reason."¹³³ This answer resonates with researchers' and the media's tendency to focus on psychosocial explanations of violence to the exclusion of socioeconomic ones that discuss structural violence as both a cause and a form of violence. It also reflects the absence of explicit references to structural violence in the young men's narratives. While the institutionalisation of unequal power relations and life chances – through historical and continuing economic exclusion, inadequate education, limited skills and employment

¹²⁹ Sibusiso, Gugulethu, 9 September 2011.

¹³⁰ See the similarities between the narratives here and the structural and psychosocial challenges facing young men in 1991 discussed in Steven Mokwena, "The Era of the Jackrollers: Contextualising the Rise of the Youth Gangs in Soweto" (paper presented at seminar at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, 30 October 1991). See also, Vanessa Barolsky, "Childhood in the Shadow of Violence: Kathorus, South Africa," in *Violence and Non-Violence in Africa*, ed. Pal Alhuwalia, Louise Bethlehem, and Ruth Ginio (London: Routledge, 2007).

¹³¹ Natasha, 16 March 2012.

¹³² Again, see, HSRC, *supra* n 8; Patrick Burton, ed., *Someone Stole My Smile: An Exploration into the Causes of Youth Violence in South Africa* (Cape Town: Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2007).

¹³³ Natasha, 16 March 2012.

opportunities, and geographic marginalisation, as discussed in detail above – comes through in the narratives as everyday experience, James and his peers do not talk about it as violence, which demonstrates the extent to which they accept structural violence as an invisible norm, a fact of life. They also do not discuss the way that structural violence has led to and enabled widespread physical violence in their lives and neighbourhoods. This appears to be a significant shift from the awareness of political and socioeconomic exclusion evidenced by young men in South African townships before the transition.¹³⁴ It also suggests that the young men are disconnected from the increasing number of service delivery protests occurring in Gugulethu and surrounding areas.¹³⁵ The lack of explicit discussion of structural violence among the young men invites further research, but one reason may be found in most insider and outsider engagements with them focusing on physical violence,¹³⁶ which is predominantly analysed as individual pathology on the one hand and as emerging from a “culture of violence” on the other.

As regards individual pathology, a recent report on perpetrators points out that the South African media – the main site of public engagement with this issue – mainly portrays perpetrators of violent crimes, such as the beatings and stabbings James has committed, “as faceless and nameless ‘monsters’ ... The brutality of their actions appears completely inexplicable, the result of a senseless evil.”¹³⁷ Such stories appear daily in national and local newspapers and television programmes. As James’ mother notes, “There’s just one page of sports in the newspapers, the rest is violence.”¹³⁸ A *City Press* news editor, in asking, “What makes our young men brutal monsters?” describes the reports on violent crime that she sifts through on a daily basis as “a litany of horror

¹³⁴ See, for example, Mokwena, supra n 130.

¹³⁵ For examples of such protests in Gugulethu and Khayelitsha in the months surrounding Chiedza’s meetings with James and the others, see, Chantall Presence, “Gugulethu Residents Demand Housing,” *Eye Witness News*, 27 April 2012; Janis Kinnear, “Protesters Threaten to Continue N2 Stoning,” *IOL News*, 3 November 2011; Nombulelo Damba, “Makhaza Housing Project Protest Flares Up Again,” *West Cape News*, 2 September 2011; Zara Nicholson, “Residents March to Demand Toilets,” *Cape Times*, 28 April 2011; Nombulelo Damba, “Khayelitsha Residents Protest over Lack of Electricity,” *West Cape News*, 18 March 2011. For discussion of these protests and how they are understood by various actors, see, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation and Society, Work and Development Institute, *The Smoke that Calls: Insurgent Citizenship, Collective Violence and the Struggle for a Place in the New South Africa* (2011); Hirsch Jain, *Community Protests in South Africa: Trends, Analysis and Explanations* (Cape Town: Community Law Centre, 2010).

¹³⁶ In a group discussion, it was mentioned that community leaders convene meetings with informal gang members and community members at which gang violence is discussed and discouraged. The young men note that whatever commitments they may make during the meetings go out the window once normal life resumes. Group discussion, 17 August 2012.

¹³⁷ Produced by the Human Sciences Research Council on behalf of CSV. HSRC, supra n 8 at 6.

¹³⁸ Natasha, 16 March 2012.

stories that litter our pages, our Twitter timelines, our dinner party conversations, our very consciousness as South Africans.”¹³⁹ The perpetrators – “usually young and male”¹⁴⁰ – are regularly referred to as inhumane monsters.¹⁴¹ This language suggests that the violence is the work of bad apples, individual “others” whose actions are senseless and therefore need not be made sense of. While this specificity appears to distinguish perpetrators from their communities, the daily, pervasive nature of reporting on violent crime committed in poor areas or by people from poor areas, such as Gugulethu, signals to outsiders to these areas that the insiders are generally violent and senseless. It also exoticises this violence for outsiders: the violence is portrayed as so prevalent and “gratuitous” that it appears to have no parallels with the violence experienced inside their own communities and families. At the same time, the specificity signals to insiders that the perpetrators are “monsters” who have gone beyond the pale of normal relations, and may deter discussion about what lies behind their actions.

When explanations are sought, reports often rely on psychosocial interpretations of individual development and behaviour. For example, in 2005, *City Press* ran an article with the header, “Prevent Your Child from Becoming a Monster,” which offered advice from a clinical psychologist who noted, “Often children develop conduct disorder (stealing, lying, and bullying others) as a result of depression,” and suggested that “depression could be treated through behavioural therapy, psychotherapy and medication.”¹⁴² While this in and of itself may be useful information that serves to demystify depression and legitimise counselling, it acquires a different sense when located in the context of a tendency to focus on the individual pathology behind violence, particularly with the article’s sensationalist header, which links unaddressed depression to becoming a violent monster. Researchers also often end up analysing violence from the perspective of individual pathology and “antisocial” behaviour, even when they engage with other causal or contributing factors.¹⁴³ Altbeker’s examination of the link between historical and institutionalised socioeconomic exclusion and physical violence boils down to assertions regarding the “huge discontent, frustration and anger” and “insecurity and self-doubt” of violent individuals living in

¹³⁹ Natasha Joseph, “What Makes Our Young Men Brutal Monsters?” *City Press*, 22 April 2012.

¹⁴⁰ HSRC, *supra* n 8 at 6.

¹⁴¹ See, for example, “SA’s Disgrace: Our Barbaric Monsters,” *Star*, 19 April 2012; Malungelo Booi, “Parents Are Creating Monsters,” *Eyewitness News*, 21 May 2012.

¹⁴² “Prevent Your Child from Becoming a Monster,” *City Press*, 16 July 2005.

¹⁴³ See, for example, Burton, *supra* n 132; Altbeker, *supra* n 6; Leoschut and Bonora, *supra* n 10.

poor areas.¹⁴⁴ While the psychosocial approach is a valid and important one, its predominance marginalises other approaches that resist readings of serious violence as the problem of “sick” individuals, of “monsters,” of “others” with personal issues and inadequate coping mechanisms who resort to “senseless evil” acts.¹⁴⁵

After reading James’ narrative, it is impossible to claim he is a monster. It is also difficult to claim that the violence he has engaged in is senseless, or even “antisocial.” As shown above, the violence between informal gangs has an internal logic and tends to follow certain rules, and violence in general can be perceived as legitimate, particularly when aimed at creating order, providing guidance, and affording protection. Patterns of “male–male” violence also appear to mirror life stages, changing in character as a young man becomes an adult. Beyond this, the narratives of James and the other young men, although intimate and often emotional, do not really reflect the “huge” discontent, insecurity, or even anger posited by some researchers, at least not to the degree that they invite being read primarily as stories of individual pathology.

Another dominant way of discussing violence in South Africa, as well as the opposite side of the coin to the individual approach, is long-standing use of the phrase “culture of violence.”¹⁴⁶ According to CSVr researchers in 1993,

The endorsement and acceptability of violence to which this label refers is crucial to an understanding of any violent incident in South Africa. Resolving conflict and problems through violence has long been a major part of South African culture. Violence played a significant role in African tribal society, in white colonial settlement, in the South African government’s programmes of repression and also in the liberation struggle against apartheid, and it continues to be a popular method of resolving conflict and achieving certain goals in the family, in sexual relationships, in the school, in peer groups, as well as in the industrial relations and political spheres. This heightened incidence of violence is not experienced equally across class, race and gender lines. Although violence touches everyone in South Africa, the most victimised are the working class, poor African communities and women.¹⁴⁷

While rightly referring to the reproduction and normalisation of violence since the apartheid era and earlier to the present day, also noted in this paper, the phrase is problematic in that it is open

¹⁴⁴ Altbeker, *supra* n 6 at 43.

¹⁴⁵ HSRC, *supra* n 8 at 6.

¹⁴⁶ Regularly used by CSVr. See, for example, *supra* n 20.

¹⁴⁷ “Culture of Violence,” in Vogelmann and Lewis, *supra* n 20.

to readings that localise violence in poor areas, particularly poor urban areas,¹⁴⁸ and as a problem of poor areas exported to wealthier areas in the form of, for example, hijacking and house breaking. Furthermore, because culture, despite the best efforts of contemporary anthropologists, is popularly viewed as static and unresponsive to attempts at change, as well as specific to a particular group, the use of the term “culture” in “culture of violence” may invite readings of violence as embedded in and espoused by insiders to poor areas, who in the Cape Town context would largely be people categorised as Coloured and African under apartheid. Finally, “culture of violence” implies that violence is pervasive and all-encompassing, eclipsing other, including nonviolent and indeed peaceful, patterns and behaviours of normal everyday life in neighbourhoods like James’. In this sense, both the individual and the “culture” approach to understanding physical violence enable the “othering” of certain communities as well as *de facto* acceptance of extreme levels of violence as a fact of life in those communities.

While research into the psychosocial drivers of violence on the one hand and the way violent behaviour has been legitimised and reproduced since colonial times in South Africa on the other is needed in attempts to understand and address the high levels of violence in the country, the ways in which this research is presented and integrated into public discourse on violence calls for thought. Moreover, these approaches, particularly the psychosocial one, can sideline the discussion of structural violence in South Africa, which is important given the historical and ongoing economic and social marginalisation of the majority of the country’s population, but difficult given its implications in terms of the state’s responsibilities to citizens, citizens’ expectations of the state, government policy regarding the country’s economic “growth path,” and restrained debate on alternatives to the dominant (neo)liberal economic model in the aftermath of the Cold War. As argued by Dale McKinley and Ahmed Veriava in 2005, “The first phase of South Africa’s ‘transition’ has witnessed the ANC’s political and ideological acceptance of the broad framework of a globally dominant, neoliberal political and economic orthodoxy [which] ... has led to the institutionalised (and false) separation between political and socio-economic change.”¹⁴⁹ With this economic policy

¹⁴⁸ As noted explicitly in Bruce, *supra* n 5 at 31, who refers to “the broader culture of criminality and violence which has institutionalised itself” in “metropolitan areas.”

¹⁴⁹ Dale McKinley and Ahmed Veriava, *Arresting Dissent: State Repression and Post-Apartheid Social Movements* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2005), 3. See also, Hein Marais, *South Africa: Limits to Change: The Political Economy of Transition*, 2nd ed. (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2001).

presented as “non-negotiable”¹⁵⁰ within ANC ranks, the ANC government has effectively marginalised and portrayed as “‘criminals’ and ‘anarchists’” people calling for greater socioeconomic equity on the ground, particularly through service delivery protests.¹⁵¹ In this sociopolitical climate, Secretary for Police Jenni Irish-Qhobosheane could freely state in 2010, “To *even link* culture [meaning the acceptability and reproduction of violence] or socio-economic conditions to commission of crime, is not a true reflection.”¹⁵² The climate seems to have changed somewhat, however, as the ANC recently released a policy document discussing the need for a “second transition” or, after discussion within the party, a “second phase of the transition” and suggesting that “having concluded our first transition with its focus on democratisation over the last eighteen years, we need a vision for a second transition that must focus on the social and economic transformation of South Africa over the next 30 to 50 years.”¹⁵³

This document suggests a response to a shift in public attitudes towards the country’s high levels of inequality and poverty. This shift had already been signalled by an apparent increase in service delivery protests around the country,¹⁵⁴ as well as by the widespread and highly public debates surrounding controversial former ANC Youth League President Julius Malema’s calls for “economic freedom” marches on government and business,¹⁵⁵ which appear to have contributed to putting the ANC under some pressure in the lead-up to the general election in 2014. The “second phase of the transition” document does not make specific proposals in terms of policy change; rather, it reflects the growing debate on this issue and represents an opening for wider discussion and advocacy concerning ways to narrow socioeconomic gaps in South Africa. In this context, analyses of inequality as a cause of physical violence are useful, particularly as violence is a tangible issue that South Africans across backgrounds and classes are interested in resolving. Physical violence can be a widely acceptable access point for addressing inequality. More important, the shift in the political and social climate calls for use of the term “structural violence” because the

¹⁵⁰ McKinley and Veriava, *supra* n 149 at 1.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁵² Quoted in Sakhile Modise, “ANC Debunks Report on South Africa’s Crime ‘Culture,’” *Afrik News*, 10 November 2010 (emphasis added).

¹⁵³ African National Congress, *The Second Transition? Building a National Democratic Society and the Balance of Forces in 2012* (2012).

¹⁵⁴ Olebogeng Molatlhwa, “Service Protests Don’t Spell ANC Demise – Zuma,” *Sowetan*, 4 July 2012.

¹⁵⁵ “Discipline, Malema, and His March to Economic Freedom,” *Mail and Guardian*, 24 October 2011: “The league said it will lead the country’s ‘unemployed and underemployed youth, the landless people, the homeless, informal settlements dwellers, and those who aspire to have access to quality education and decent lives’ in this mass protest.”

term both underlines the role of government policy in maintaining grossly unequal life opportunities among citizens and stresses the reading that institutionalised marginalisation is violence. More specifically, marginalisation institutionalised by government policy is state violence.

The narratives of James and his peers demonstrate that they are subject to the inadequate education, limited skills and employment opportunities, and geographic marginalisation that constitute their exclusion from the mainstream economy and attendant social life of the country today and most likely going forward. Like the physical violence that this everyday marginalisation fosters, socioeconomic exclusion has been reproduced within families and communities over generations. While both the physical violence and the exclusion are normalised and considered a fact of life in South Africa, physical violence is viewed as a crime that should be addressed in each instance. Some level of exclusion, however, is widely considered socially acceptable, even among the people who suffer its effects most.¹⁵⁶ After more than 15 years, the government's chosen "growth path" has decidedly benefitted some while leaving the majority in the same or a worse position than before 1996.¹⁵⁷ The government can be credited for increasing social spending over the years to R111.2 billion in 2011–2012,¹⁵⁸ but while this spending helps people coping with poverty survive, it does not address the structural violence in the country and does not do enough to counter the effects of the "growth plan." As anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes notes, "structural violence is violence that is permissible, even encouraged," by individuals and institutions at all levels of society, including government.¹⁵⁹ South Africa's "growth path" represents the renewed institutionalisation of previous forms of historical exclusion, with its socially divergent benefits, and while structural violence describes a complex of social and economic factors with a variety of actors, it is government's economic policies that require debate and intervention. These policies are the result of "human decisions" within government whose aims are endorsed as

¹⁵⁶ Beyond the narratives described in this paper, see, for example, the mixture of long-suffering patience and anger concerning the lack of socioeconomic change in the narratives of women involved in the liberation struggle in South Africa. According to Sindiswa Nunu's narrative, "I am one of the people who were committed in the struggle. At least there are things we see as an achievement, *understanding that change won't come all at once*; that we won't be covered all at once. But we should complain when we get *nothing*." Quoted in Shirley Gunn and Sinazo Krwala, eds., *Knocking On: Mothers and Daughters in Struggle in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation and Human Rights Media Centre, 2008) (emphasis added).

¹⁵⁷ Leibbrandt et al., *supra* n 24.

¹⁵⁸ "Social Assistance Still Crucial: Gordhan," SouthAfrica.info (22 February 2012), <http://www.southafrica.info/about/social/budget2012-social.htm> (accessed 28 August 2012).

¹⁵⁹ Nancy Scheper-Hughes, "Dangerous and Endangered Youth: Social Structures and Determinants of Violence," *Annals New York Academy of Sciences* 1036 (2004): 14.

legitimate and whose consequences are implied to be permissible.¹⁶⁰ When such policies are read as a form of violence – of state violence towards its citizens – the political and moral flexibility that underpins their legitimacy is soon stripped away. The concept of structural violence therefore provides an analytical framework and an advocacy tool that may be particularly effective in the apparently more self-reflective social and political climate of South Africa today.

Conclusion

Since its inception in 1999, the Violence and Transition project has sought to identify the changes and continuities in violence since the political transition in South Africa through a variety of lenses. In this paper, for the most recent phase of the project, I have attempted to demonstrate the multiple connections among physical violence, masculinity, and structural violence through the life history narratives of James Madoda, a young man living in Gugulethu township, and several of his peers and family members.

Building on recent research, the paper suggests that structural and physical violence, along with ideas about manhood, act as a lattice framework for the daily experiences of James and his peers. The narratives of James' grandmother and mother suggest that his family has historically been excluded from participating in the economic life of the country as a result of the legacies of colonialism and apartheid as well as the economic policies adopted by the post-transition government in a way that continues to limit their life opportunities. With low levels of education and skill, the majority of South Africans have been unable to access the high-skilled jobs fostered by the country's current "growth path" and have remained in low-skilled jobs or often resorted to the growing informal sector. Many have also remained in urban areas far from and with limited access to economic centres despite the abolishment of apartheid-era laws that enforced geographic marginalisation for the majority, largely as a result of historical neighbourhood and family ties. Research shows that their children are likely to face the same obstacles, primarily based on the constraints elicited by the family's education level and geographic location. This is borne out by James' and his peers' stories of dropping out of school and their vague expectations regarding finding employment.

¹⁶⁰ Farmer, 1996, *supra* n 16.

Beyond the intergenerational reproduction of socioeconomic limitations, the demands of low-skilled and particularly informal sector work may drive caregivers' absence from home and contribute to boys and young men spending days on neighbourhood streets with little oversight, watching and often modelling violent behaviour. The narratives suggest, furthermore, that boys and young men in poor urban areas rarely leave their immediate neighbourhood for financial and social reasons, and this lack of mobility both contributes to their "sitting in the neighbourhood" and builds their loyalty to that neighbourhood, simultaneously exposing them to and encouraging their participation in the violence of territorial informal gangs, which the young men describe as nearly unavoidable. In addition, they are exposed to violence by police and neighbours who suspect them of criminality. The narratives also indicate that once a young man is part of an informal gang, he is more likely to be written off by school authorities, which may lead him to disengage from his studies, drop out, or lack the information and guidance needed to transfer to another school and thereby further limits his life opportunities. Despite the implications of participating in gang violence in terms of physical, social, and long-term economic risks, as well as a general belief that violence is, as James says, "wrong," violence is nonetheless often considered legitimate not only by the young men but also by the adults around them – particularly when read as providing guidance, protection, discipline, and self-reliance – and willingness to perpetrate legitimate violence is linked in the narratives to growing up from a boy into a young man and to masculine identity in general. The young men's narratives thus show that the structural violence represented by limited life opportunities and lack of mobility, and institutionalised by policy decisions, is intimately interwoven with experiences and perceptions of physical violence, and is in fact a driver of this physical violence.

I have argued that physical violence needs to be analysed through the lens of structural violence, which analysis has been sidelined by more dominant analyses based on psychosocial influences on violent individuals and on South Africa's "culture of violence." While research on the psychosocial drivers of physical violence as well as the way violent behaviour has been legitimised and reproduced since before colonial times is useful and necessary, and has been referenced in this paper, it carries the risk of "othering" those living in poor urban areas. An analysis based on structural violence highlights the broader ways in which social and economic inequality is institutionalised at all levels of society and people are subjected to limitations on their life opportunities that are avoidable and the result of choices by individuals and institutions,

particularly for this paper, policy choices. Here, I have sought to demonstrate the way that structural violence has given rise to and shored up physical violence in the neighbourhoods in which James and the other young men live.

A shift appears to have occurred in the political and social climate in South Africa that has encouraged debate on socioeconomic inequality to the point that the ruling party, hostile since the 1990s to challenges to its economic policies, has demonstrated an openness to debate on the subject. I suggest that in addition to encouraging more discussion by showing the link between inequality and violence – an issue in which all South Africans are invested – researchers and other stakeholders would do well to focus on the institutionalised marginalisation that fosters socioeconomic inequality as a form of state violence. The term “structural violence” is useful in this regard as it brings attention to the role of government policies in institutionalising unequal life opportunities as well as highlights that this is indeed violence. It also provides a common ground for collaboration and an advocacy tool for civil society actors – from social movements to nongovernmental organisations – working for socioeconomic transformation on one hand and the prevention of physical violence on the other. This approach is particularly timely given that following recent calls for the army to be called in to prevent formal and informal gang violence in Cape Town, South African President Jacob Zuma rejected the proposal and noted that “socio-economic conditions” in the Cape Flats need to be addressed and “directed ministers in the social and economic sectors to study the situation and look for long-term solutions that promote sustainable development and stable communities.”¹⁶¹ The president should be held to this commitment to look beyond short-term responses to gang violence and identify policy solutions that address the structural violence that drives everyday physical violence in poor urban areas. Further discussion on structural violence in South Africa may in time lead not only to a situation where young men no longer speak of “leav[ing] the gangster things to the boys that are growing up now,”¹⁶² but also to one where structural violence is no longer considered a fact of life but is rather both visible and unacceptable.

¹⁶¹ As announced by his spokesman, Mac Maharaj. “No Troops for Cape Ganglands,” *IOL News*, 15 August 2012.

¹⁶² James, 26 October 2011.



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